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JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Al-Hariri Assassination
Anniversary, British Abuse Video, HAMAS, Iran (2/15)

1. Summary: Syrian papers reported a mass rally by Syrians in occupied Golan observing the 24th anniversary of the 1982 strike, called by the sons of occupied Golan to reject Israel's annexation of the Golan and impose an Israeli identity on its sons. Speakers emphasized that they stood behind President Asad's leadership and rejected the threats and pressure on Syria. They denounced the publication of cartoons on the prophet Mohammad in Western media under the pretext of freedom of expression. Speeches were delivered by Arabs who had been captives in Israeli jails, former Lebanese Minister We'am Wahab, and Secretary General of the Arab Socialist Movement Ahmed al-Ahmed.

The first anniversary of the Al-Hariri assassination was a lead press story. A typical headline in Tishreen read "A rally of rancor on Valentine Day. The Al-Hariri anniversary turns into a platform to attack Syria. A forum for curses, insults and charlatanism is held at the Martyrs Square in Beirut."

Syrian papers also featured a New York Times report confirming a US scheme to foil HAMAS and cited a White House report denying such a scheme.

End summary.

2. Selected Headlines:

"Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian voices join in a celebration commemorating the 24th anniversary of the 1982 strike announced by the sons of occupied Golan to reject Israel's annexation of the Golan" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 1/15)

"Reactions to campaign of misinformation continue. Nasrallah: Lebanon is in a state of war with Israel. We will not relinquish arms. Lebanese statements: The Shebaa Farms are Lebanese. Those who cast doubts about the Lebanese identity of the farms seek to legitimize the occupation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/15)

"A rally of rancor on Valentine Day. The Al-Hariri anniversary turns into a platform to attack Syria. A forum for curses, insults and charlatanism is held in Beirut's Martyrs Square. Rancorous trade on Al-Hariri blood, impingement upon pan-Arab principles, and national resistance" (Government-owned Tishreen,

2/15)

"Israel endeavors to drag Lebanon into civil strife" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/15)

"New York Time confirms and Washington denies a US scheme to foil HAMAS. Mofaz is determined to proceed with the policy of assassinations. Occupation forces continue shelling" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/15)

"Spain endeavors to promote an 'alliance of civilizations'. The EU and Washington continue to defend Denmark. 57 Islamic countries propose a draft UNSC resolution banning insults of sanctities" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/15)

"Six US soldiers killed or injured in Baghdad. Basra boycotts British forces and calls for pulling out Danish forces" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/15)

"A joint Russian-French proclamation on security and terrorism issues. Iran is called upon to fully abide by its commitments" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/15)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"A Student Outdoing his Master"

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (2/15): "Syria was the party most harmed by Al-Hariri's assassination.... For a full year Syria has been, and still is, the target of unprecedented campaigns of pressure, accusations, lies, and threats against the background of the heinous crime.... This means that those who killed Al-Hariri basically targeted Syria and wanted to take revenge against it and force it to change its conduct....
"Countries, organizations, and figures joined Washington in its campaign of pressure and accusations against Syria. These accusations were based on lies, fabrications, and deception....

"A Lebanese group claiming to be a majority in the parliament has outdone its master in lying. If Iraq's invasion was based on forged intelligence information -- and this information is from the Americans, not from us -- the 'heroes' of hostility toward Syria outdid their American masters at slyness, malice, and lying. They took the initiative upon themselves. Not only did they direct accusations to Syria immediately after every crime committed in Lebanon, but they also fabricated false witnesses and presented them on a golden platter to the international investigation commission.... The truth will come out; the masks will fall off. And the conspiracy will be foiled...."

"The First Anniversary: Who Killed Al-Hariri?"

Salim Abbud, an op-ed in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (2/15): "The March 14th forces in Lebanon are not really interested in knowing who assassinated Rafiq al-Hariri.... These forces, which were not united before Al-Hariri's assassination, got together for three reasons or objectives. Firstly, to trade on the Al-Hariri assassination. Secondly, to separate Lebanon from its Arabism, spoil its relationship with Damascus, and reject every Arab effort to heal the rift between Syria and Lebanon and search for the truth calmly and with an open mind by asking the necessary questions to reach the real killer, because the aim of the real killer was to cause the earthquake that the assassination brought about. Thirdly, to get Lebanon involved in the American-Israeli scheme, which seeks to draft a new map for the region, pressure and besiege Syria, revive the May 17th agreement with Israel, and disarm the resistance, which defeated Israel in the south...."

"Twisted Alignment"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (2/15): "At the time Israel continues its assaults against south Lebanon and Israeli warplanes violate Lebanese airspace, some Lebanese who volunteered to promote the Israeli-American plan launch provocative statements against the Lebanese resistance.... Aren't those who want to disarm the resistance, which liberated south Lebanon in 2000 and which is responding to the Israeli aggression and standing as a strong barrier in the face of Israeli treachery, placing themselves in the service of the American-Israeli plan? Aren't those who say the Israeli withdrawal from the south was complete in accordance with Resolution 425 and that there is no longer a need for the national resistance, confirming their alliance with the objectives, goals, and intentions of Lebanon's enemies....?"

"The suspicious connections of these Lebanese have been exposed.... Israel was and still is Lebanon's number one enemy and the main instigator for chaos, evil, and tension in the region. The attempts to promote its prejudiced plans will fail, as its occupation of Lebanese territory failed. And these people will not be served by their impingement upon the national and pan-Arab choices of the Lebanese people."

"A Barbaric Viewpoint"

Bassam Radwan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, commented (2/15): "If the barbaric and horrendous scene of British occupation troops in Iraq beating, kicking, and clubbing civilian and defenseless Iraqis in a manner that reflects abhorrent and heinous sadism is not surprising, what is really surprising, to the point of shock, is the comment made by British Prime Minister Tony Blair on this crime and similar crimes of occupation, whether in Iraq or Palestine...."

"The strange irony here is that within the context of these facts and photos, which seem to have been taken by someone who takes pleasure in torturing and brutalizing young Iraqis, the British prime minister, in an attempt to mitigate the effect of the shock, stressed that what the world had seen was an individual incident and that his troops, which participated in the occupation of Iraq to promote freedom and democracy, enjoy a sense of responsibility and observe a straightforward code of conduct as occupying forces subject to international law."

"There is no doubt that this episode clearly proves one thing; namely, that the nature of occupation is the same everywhere in terms of its conduct, method, and style of injustice and oppression of the people under occupation, regardless of whether this occupation is under the umbrella of the absent international law, outside this framework, or somewhere in between. The misleading and ridiculous talk about the mission of the US and British occupation troops in spreading the values of freedom and democracy in Iraq has been exposed as a lie by the photos of the British troops and dozen of other photos by their US counterparts. The moral and humanitarian claims of the neocolonialists no longer fool anybody."

"Storming Scandal"

Ali Qasim, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/15): "The British soldiers who were engaged in disgusting sadism against Iraqi teenagers will most likely receive light punishments while their commanders remain immune, as happened in similar previous cases...."

"Perhaps statements by the British PM Blair bring to mind statements made by American officials after the Abu Ghraib scandal. The inquiry he promised to conduct will not be better than the inquiry that the Americans conducted. The sentences against those who were involved in the shameless acts will not be harsher than those passed against some American soldiers, but the hands and minds that were behind those practices will be acquitted....

"The issue is not conduct by some individuals as much as it is a systematic policy followed in all ages. The occupier remains the same throughout history...."

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